



Committee on Resources

U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall, Ranking Democrat

1329 Longworth HOB - Washington, D.C. 20515

108th Congress - Democratic Agenda

"If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it." -President Lyndon B. Johnson, upon signing the Wilderness Act of 1964

- ***Preserving America's Heritage*** – While some voices are being raised to tear down our Nation's monuments and develop our wild lands, Americans are demanding greater outdoor recreation opportunities to hunt, to fish and to simply enjoy our natural environment. Renewed efforts should be made to fulfill the promise of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, update the Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program as well as to protect the wilderness potential of public lands.
- ***Maintaining Public's Right-to-Know*** – Often referred to as the "Magna Carta" of our Nation's environmental laws, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has come under assault by the Bush Administration. The fundamental aspects of NEPA – public input into major federal actions, the consideration of alternatives and the right of citizens to seek redress in the courts – provides for full disclosure of the potential impacts of development projects. While the NEPA process can be improved, the law must not be gutted under the guise of "streamlining."
- ***Keeping Faith With Native Americans*** – Compared to all races in the United States, Native Americans suffer a death rate that is 500% higher from tuberculosis, 390% higher from diabetes, 740% higher from alcoholism, and 340% higher from injuries. The Indian Health Care Improvement Act provides for the delivery of health services for over 1.3 million American Indians and Alaska Natives throughout the Nation yet it expired in 2001. Each year since, legislation to reauthorize the Act has been pending before the House but the Republican leadership has failed to permit its consideration. Keeping faith with Native Americans in part demands that Congress act immediately to reauthorize the Indian Health Care Improvement Act this year.
- ***Addressing America's Energy Needs*** – While some claim that the best means to better fulfill the Nation's energy needs rests in opening up more federal lands such as a national wildlife refuge in Alaska to oil and gas development,

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or that federal lands are not living up to their energy potential, there has been a three-fold increase in energy production (oil, gas, coal and hydropower) from federal lands since 1970. Today, the Nation's federal lands are providing nearly one-third of total U.S. energy production, up from just over 10% in 1970. This increased production, however, has done little to decrease U.S. dependence on foreign sources of energy. Actions should be taken to meet America's energy needs through the contribution of other sources of energy as well as incentives to stimulate energy production on non-federal lands in an environmentally responsible fashion.

- ***Responding to Western Water Crisis*** – Rapidly growing urban areas in the Western states are finding themselves short of water, the result of both natural drought conditions and man-made imbalances in the allocation of scarce water resources. Southern California must now adjust to huge reductions in Colorado River water deliveries as other states claim their lawful entitlements to the river. Texas farmers and cities are at odds with our Mexican neighbors over limited water supplies. And all around the West, pressure is building to restore rivers and streams that have been damaged by poorly planned water development projects. Current budget priorities for water are still being written to address the water supply priorities of the 1930s and 1940s. We need to direct limited funds to new projects to recycle water and create new supplies from desalting ocean water in coastal areas.
- ***Safeguarding God's Creatures*** – The majority of Americans support a strong Endangered Species Act and the protection of our Nation's imperiled species. Despite this, the ESA is constantly under attack in the Congress. Instead of seeking to adopt sweeping amendments to gut the ESA, efforts should focus on strengthening the law to make it work better for species and people. Changes to the law that will recover and delist endangered species and provide economic and other incentives for landowners to protect species should be given priority consideration.
- ***Respecting Sacred Sites*** – Across the country, sites of religious importance to Native Americans are in danger of becoming casualties of the Administration's push to open federal lands to development. Despite several laws in place aiming to protect the religious freedom of Native Americans and the historic and cultural value of their lands, there is no comprehensive approach or enforceable law to protect sacred lands from energy development and other potentially harmful activities. Congress should enact a comprehensive law to empower Indian tribes to protect Native sacred places.

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- ***Investing In Our Forest Lands*** – More than 380,000 miles of roads have been constructed in our National Forests primarily to provide access for logging. Currently, the Forest Service receives less than 20% of its needs annually to maintain these roads and has an \$8.4 billion repair backlog. This lack of maintenance increases public safety threats as well as landslides and slope failures that in turn endanger watersheds and fish and wildlife habitat. Wise and prudent investment strategies dictate this maintenance backlog should be addressed before opening any pristine Forest Service roadless areas to new construction.
- ***Reclaiming America*** – Throughout the Appalachian and coal mining regions across the country there remains a high number of abandoned mine sites which endanger public health, safety and the coalfield environment. The fees assessed on the coal industry which finance the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program are currently set to expire in fiscal year 2004 leaving the program about \$1 billion short of the amount needed to reclaim high priority sites. This program should be reauthorized by the 108th Congress.
- ***Protecting America's Fisheries*** – Marine fisheries in the United States face serious conservation and management problems. Numerous fisheries disasters have been declared over the past several years and more than \$406 million of taxpayer dollars have been allocated for direct assistance to fishermen and to buy back fishing boats and permits. While the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act was amended in 1996 in an effort to reverse the decline of marine fisheries, the vitality of our fisheries has not improved. Instead of seeking to rollback Magnuson Act protections as some have proposed, efforts should be redoubled to determine why the health of our fisheries is not improving and what actions are needed to avert disasters and the expenditure of hundreds of millions of additional taxpayer dollars for industry bailouts.
- ***Enhancing The Nation's Wildlife Habitats*** – The National Wildlife Refuge System is currently burdened by a \$955 million backlog in operations, maintenance and construction. This backlog undermines the ecological integrity and promise of the entire 93 million acre System and diminishes public use and enjoyment – a condition that will only worsen if the upward trend in public visitation continues. Actions need to be taken to eliminate this backlog. Consideration should also be given to alternatives which enhance the stature of the Refuge System within the Department of the Interior and address critical environmental threats such as invasive species.

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- ***Ending Corporate Welfare*** – The Mining Law of 1872 is a relic of a bygone era, written to encourage the development of the mining industry and the settlement of the western United States. Today, however, it defies logic to allow multinational corporate conglomerates to mine valuable hardrock minerals such as gold and silver from Western federal lands without paying a royalty to the people of the United States, or to allow these corporations to purchase these lands at 1872 prices. The Mining Law should be reformed to take into account the public interest.
- ***Putting Trust Into Trust Accounts*** – The federal government has been the trustee of funds for Indian tribes and individual Indians for more than one hundred years. Currently, the Secretary of Interior maintains over 1,400 tribal trust fund accounts and approximately 300,000 individual Indian accounts. Monies for these trust fund accounts are generated from rights and leases, including grazing, quarrying, timber, agriculture, oil, natural gas, and minerals on lands held in trust by the government for the account holders. Reports of mismanagement of trust fund accounts date back almost from their inception and so far all attempts to rectify and reform the situation have failed. In order to force the government to account for monies lost through mismanagement and bring permanent reform to the system, a class action suit was filed in 1996 by individual Indian account holders. Fear of the cost of federal liability to account holders has fueled continuation of the law suit and hampered any serious reform efforts. Restitution must be made to the account holders and significant reform must occur.
- ***Empowering Insular Areas*** – The current economic condition of United States insular areas is dire. Fragile regional markets, trade restrictions, and burdensome tax regulations are but a few of the obstacles that insular areas must overcome to fully develop their economies. In order for insular areas to continue maturing politically and socially, they must be able to do so within the environment of a stable economy. Legislation should be considered which enables insular governments to diversify their economies and lift restrictions that unfairly work against them.

"... all things share the same breath - the beast, the tree, the man ... the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports." -Chief Seattle, Duwamish

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